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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 101126521-0640-02]

RIN 0648-XB028

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod for American Fisheries Act Catcher/Processors Using Trawl Gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by American Fisheries Act (AFA) trawl catcher/processors in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the A season allowance of the 2012 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) specified for AFA trawl catcher-processors in the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), February 17, 2012, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 1, 2012.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (FMP) prepared by

the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The A season allowance of the 2012 Pacific cod TAC specified for AFA trawl catcher-processors in the BSAI is 4,021 metric tons as established by the final 2011 and 2012 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (76 FR 11139, March 1, 2011) and inseason adjustment (76 FR 81875, December 29, 2011).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i) and (d)(1)(ii)(B), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the A season allowance of the 2012 Pacific cod TAC allocated to AFA trawl catcher processors in the BSAI will be taken as incidental catch in the directed fishing for other species. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance for Pacific cod allocated to AFA trawl catcher processors in the BSAI of 0 mt. In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance has been reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by AFA trawl catcher processors in the BSAI.

After the effective date of this closure the maximum retainable amounts at § 679.20(e) and (f) apply at any time during a trip.

#### Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment

pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the closure of Pacific cod by AFA trawl catcher/processors in the BSAI. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of February 16, 2012.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.

Dated: February 17, 2012

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Carrie Selberg,  
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,  
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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